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Steel Chrysanthemums: Feminism and
Nationalist Rhetoric in Meiji Japan

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Feminism and Nationalistic Rhetoric in Meiji Japan

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of externality to power....[T]he strictly relational character of power relationships...depends upon a multiplicity of points of resistance.

Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*

Introduction: Making Waves

“I had told no one of my plans to go to college,” wrote Hiratsuka Raichou. “[Japan Women’s College had been founded] amid vehement opposition—people said it was either too early or completely unnecessary [...] [Naruse]’s basic philosophy was to educate women first as human beings; second, as individuals; and third, as Japanese citizens.”¹ This may seem like an uncontroversial conclusion to make, considering the current attitude towards post-secondary education, but in nineteenth-century Japanese culture, the continued education of women was something which was both exhorted and reviled. Women in Japan were often actively encouraged to become educated, but only to the point of which they would be of most service to the state—as wives and mothers of Japanese men, perpetuators of the *good wife, wise mother* ideal. It meant that many Japanese women framed their lives—whether those lives occurred alongside or completely in contrast to the ideals of the Meiji Era—within the boundaries of state-sanctioned ideas and theories, and based their characters entirely around the ideals of Japanese nationalism.

¹ Hiratsuka Raichou, trans. Teruko Craig, *In The Beginning, Woman Was The Sun: The Autobiography of a Japanese Feminist* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 64.

Literally translated, *ryousai kenbo*² means *good wife, wise mother*: it was the main task of women's education to prepare them for this purpose. "In Japan we take it for granted that girls should get married and become wives and mothers. [...] The main objective of girls' education ought to be to help them accomplish this,"³ claimed Kikuchi Dairoku, an education minister of the Japanese government. Kikuchi's speech was made in 1902, fairly late in the Meiji Period (1868-1912 CE), but it embodied the cultural and political motifs of the era in Japan.

By the time the Meiji Emperor had come to power in 1868, Japan had been transformed. The American naval officer Commodore Matthew Perry had, through threat of violence⁴, opened Japan's borders to the world in 1854, after a period of three centuries of absolutely no international interaction. Almost all visitors to Japan during this closed period were summarily dispatched⁵, and any Japanese who crossed over the border was forbidden to return. Once the Japanese borders had been opened, and the imperial line restored to power, however, western culture and cultural influences became far more common. New ideas—political, philosophical, economic, industrial, educational, and others—flooded the Japanese archipelago. With the dismantling of the Confucian caste system that had been in place throughout the Tokugawa period, opportunities for all levels of Japanese society, from education to employment, became available.

One of the most prominent changes that came about was the revolution for women in regards to employment. Previously, women had been encouraged mostly to stay at home, but

² All Japanese romanizations will be written in traditional Hepburn format. All Japanese names will be written in the traditional format of surname first, given name secondary. Ex. Tsuda Umeko: Tsuda = surname, Umeko = given name.

³ Hiroko Tomida, *Hiratsuka Raichou and Early Japanese Feminism* (London, Boston: Brill, 2004), 39.

⁴ Perry stated he would open fire on the Japanese port of Nagasaki a year from his first arrival, if he did not return to find the Japanese ports open and the nation willing to trade.

⁵ Aside from the Dutch, who, having never attempted to proselytize religion on Japanese soil, were granted trading rights on a man-made island in a bay near Nagasaki.

after the beginning of the Meiji Period, new prospects opened up for women in a multitude of arenas, not insignificantly education. While it was not uncommon, previously, for women to act as educators in the pre-Meiji Period, it was also not actively encouraged. After 1868, though, new girls' schools were founded in large Japanese cities, at every level of education, in an attempt to improve a previously backwards image of Japanese society in the eyes of westerners. Many of the girls who attended these schools were from the upper-middle or noble classes, girls with families who had enough money to pay the expensive tuition fees. Not only that, but educators also began to work towards transforming the Japanese education system into one which was essentially, in a word, *Western*.

To achieve this purpose, a group of young Japanese girls were, in the years immediately following 1868, brought by the Iwakura Mission to the United States, where they were left to be raised by American families and taught in American schools. These five girls were the first Japanese students to ever study abroad. Only three of the five girls succeeded in this venture—Yamakawa Sutematsu and Nagai Shigeko, who both studied at Vassar College; and Tsuda Ume, later known as Umeko, who founded what is now known as Tsuda College in Kodaira, Tokyo, Japan. Tsuda is a prominent figure in Japanese women's education, and has been since the turn of the twentieth century; never marrying, she worked for decades to better the position of Japanese women, claiming in an early letter to her American foster mother that “women have the hardest part of life to bear in more ways than one. Even in America I often wished I were a man. Oh, how much more so in Japan!”⁶ Tsuda College (well known in the Meiji Period as *Joshi eigaku juku*, or Women's English Academy) was the only college for women in Japan run by a

⁶ Yoshiko Furuki, editor, et al. *The Attic Letters: Ume Tsuda's Correspondence to Her American Mother* (New York: Weatherhill Inc., 1991), 23.

woman in the Meiji period, and figured prominently in Japanese culture as a major proponent of the *ryousai kenbo* refrain.

Unlike Tsuda, Hiratsuka Raichou never worked as a teacher. Instead, as the daughter of a bureaucrat, a student at the surprisingly liberal Japan Women's College, and a self-professed feminist, Hiratsuka openly disagreed with Tsuda and many of her compatriots. In the magazine she helped found—*Seitou*, or *The Bluestocking*, the first women's magazine in Japan to be crafted and run almost entirely by women—she wrote, “In the beginning, woman was truly the sun. An authentic person. Now she is the moon, a wan and sickly moon, dependent on another, reflecting another's brilliance. ...Today, whatever a woman says invites scornful laughter. I know full well what lurks behind this scornful laughter. Yet I do not fear in the least.”⁷

Hiratsuka's writing identified the Japanese woman with the symbol of Japan—the rising sun—which had been transformed through the efforts of society into a pale reflection into what she had once been; her goal, through all she did, was to restore women to their rightful place within society, so that they could have an equal say in the country that Japan was becoming. Hiratsuka was fighting for equal rights for women in Japanese society, rather than simply buying into the nationalistic attitudes in Meiji Japan. Simultaneously, Hiratsuka was just as affected as Tsuda was by Japanese nationalism, albeit in highly different ways. Her attitude, rather than acceding to the politics of the time, was to fly in the face of them, which resulted in more notoriety than she could have ever imagined. Despite this, her professional work was couched in patriotic prose so thick that it identified all parts of the Japanese woman with the nation—body, heart, and soul.

In spite of their multitude of differences, both Tsuda Umeko and Hiratsuka Raichou identified as the ‘new Japanese woman.’ This focus on what it meant to *be* Japanese—a new

⁷ Hiratsuka, 157.

Japan for a new, industrial, international age—was a transformative force throughout the Meiji Period. It brought forward a new sense of identity within many parts of Japanese society through the vehicle of education. Feminism was not exempt from this phenomenon, though sadly this has been largely unexplored in historiography. Sharon Sievers' *Flowers in Salt*, considered one of the definitive texts on Japanese feminism, mentions nationalism only in passing, and the monographs which followed it only perpetuate the trend.

Through examining feminism's proponents—and its dissidents—a new way of describing Japanese feminism can be crafted: Japanese feminism was affected irreversibly and unarguably by Japanese nationalism: arguments for and against were made within the context of nationalism and nationalistic dialogue. In some ways, the feminist movement of Japan was simply a reflection of Japanese nationalism, regardless of the wishes, desires, or intentions of the women working under its shadow; in others, it transcended it, and became the mechanism through which Japanese women expressed their own Japanese-ness—in other words, how they expressed their patriotism. To Tsuda and Hiratsuka, nationalism and patriotism were not just what one *did*, but the performance of all one *was*, and this was expressed in their work and in their writing. Through the study of Tsuda Umeko and Hiratsuka Raichou, two prominent women of the era, this new angle to Japanese feminism can be more fully explored—and, hopefully, explained.

The Flowers of an Era: Feminism and Politics in Meiji Japan

At the beginning of the Meiji Period, the position of women in Japan was a complicated one. Men in Japanese society were praised for becoming more Western—for cutting their hair, learning new ways, and stepping forward into modernity. Women were not. In the same society where the system of concubinage was being attacked by the Meiji government for being unjust in its “subordination of individuals in the family to an irrational social arrangement permitting the

strong to tyrannize the weak”⁸ it was also illegal for women to bob their hair, even for medical reasons.⁹ Women who spoke out for essential rights were insulted, their images ruined with rumor; Kishida Toshiko, one of the primary speakers for women’s rights in the 1880s, was consistently linked with married politicians, and insulted by many politicians for daring to speak her mind.¹⁰ Essentially, the question of what women were to become in this new period was caught up intrinsically in the incapability of many Japanese to understand what *Japan* was going to become in the world that had suddenly been opened to them. This, in turn, connected Japanese women and their recreation with the politics of the Japanese state.

Before the Meiji Period, it had been extremely simple to define the role of a woman in Japanese society. The Tokugawa Period, its government based heavily in Confucian teachings and ideals, relied heavily upon a text known as the *Onna daigaku*, or *The Greater Learning for Women*. Written in 1716, it was, in essence, a Confucian rulebook for women and their behavior in society, which depended, among other things, on the absolute submission of a wife to her husband. According to the *Onna daigaku*:

A woman has no particular lord. She must look to her husband as her lord, and must serve him with all worship and reverence, not despising or thinking lightly of him. The great lifelong duty of a woman is obedience. In her dealings with her husband, both the expression of her countenance and style of her address should be courteous, humble and conciliatory, never peevish and intractable, never rude and arrogant—that should be a woman’s first and chief care. [...] A woman should look upon her husband as if he were Heaven himself, and never be weary of thinking how she may yield to him and thus escape celestial castigation.¹¹

The *Onna daigaku* is simply one example as to how the women of the Tokugawa Period and before had no cultural outlet for their own wishes, desires, dreams, or requirements. The

⁸ Sharon Sievers, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginning of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 19.

⁹ Sievers, 14-15.

¹⁰ Sievers, 42.

¹¹ Tomida, 25-26.

Confucianist state had established a position for them within society, and to remove oneself from that position led to immediate and virulent censure—sometimes centuries of it.¹² After the clash between imperial forces and the *bakufu*¹³ state of the Tokugawa Period ended with the Emperor on top, society was revamped. Old feudalistic styles of governance were phased out; old feudalistic attitudes were reviled. Women were allowed to divorce, to marry and adopt across class boundaries; they were even allowed to marry foreigners, if they received governmental dispensation.¹⁴ Not only that, but the government's attitude towards women's education completely transformed. Major leaders in the Meiji government, including Mori Arinori and Iwakura Tomomi, were convinced in the 1860s and 1870s that “the key to modernize Japan was the education of both men and women, as was occurring in the west.”¹⁵

In 1872, the Fundamental Education Law made it mandatory for Japanese to undergo elementary education, regardless of sex. Publicly-funded elementary schools exceeded 24,200 in number in Japan by 1875, but attendance at these institutions, especially for girls, was incredibly low. Not only was it extraordinarily different and strange, for many Japanese, to send their daughters to school, but even publicly-funded institutions were too expensive for many to send their children to attend, even if they had wanted to. Because of this, many girls continued to be educated at home.¹⁶ Not only that, but after the coining of the *ryousai kenbo* ideal in 1890, educated women in Japan began to be viewed as strange; in many cases, as deviant, sexualized, and dangerous. Like in many post-revolutionary societies, “emphasis on the mother-educator

¹² A Heian Period poetess, Ono no Komachi, wrote explicitly and genuinely about romance, female sexual desire, sexual affairs, and other “verboten” topics for women; her biography was transformed into a Buddhist script on sin in women, and made into a multitude of moral-based folktales as punishment. Ono no Komachi was also one of the only prominent women writers for centuries before the Meiji Period.

¹³ A military state based within Confucian and Buddhist values which was run by the *shogun* in place of the Emperor. The state was born out of feuding families in the Kamakura Period (1185-1333 CE) and lasted until the end of the Tokugawa Era.

¹⁴ Tomida, 35.

¹⁵ Tomida, 37.

¹⁶ Tomida, 37-38.

increased [...] as women were effectively shut out of post-revolutionary political life.”¹⁷ While Japan’s government solidified into what became the Shinto imperialist state, women were nudged further and further out of the political sphere, and into a solely familial role. As women in Japan were being politically ostracized, especially after the collapse of the Liberal Party (as detailed later), the political attitude towards women became more and more focused upon a woman’s ability to be a mother, rather than her ability to be an individual. According to Czarneski in her piece “Bad Girls from Good Families: The Degenerate Meiji School Girl”, the ideal Japanese woman of the Meiji Period “must be a good-wife-wise-mother aspiring middle/upper-class virgin.”¹⁸ Women who did not fulfill this archetype were regarded solely as a danger to themselves and others.

Women’s education was not the only issue upon which the government was divided in regards to female rights. At the beginning of the Meiji Period, the role women would play in creating the new, Westernized nation of Japan was a hot topic in Japanese political circles. In the beginning of the Meiji Period, opinions were divided between conservatives (who believed women should remain in generally the same position prescribed to them by the *Onna daigaku*) and Westernists (who proposed that women not only take more of a role in society, but Westernize themselves to the point of nearly becoming “foreign wives”). Issues involving Japanese women—which were often discussed without a feminine perspective—included everything from education to prostitution, and continued to expand throughout the 1870s. One of the most important groups in this nationwide political debate was the *Meirokeisha* (literally translated as “the Meiji Six Society”), a group of Western-educated Meiji intellectuals whose

¹⁷ Karen Offen, “Liberty, Equality, and Justice for Women: The Theory and Practice of Feminism in Nineteenth Century Europe” in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*. Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz, and Susan Stuard, ed. Boston, Dallas: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987. 346.

¹⁸ Melanie Czarneski, “Bad Girls From Good Families: The Degenerate Meiji Schoolgirl,” in *Bad Girls of Japan*, Laura Miller and Jan Bradsley, ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 51.

main mission was to “[determine and explain] the reasons for Western success, as well as defining it”¹⁹ in social, political, and cultural terms. It was Nakamura Masanao, a member of the *Meiokusha*, who is often credited with coining the much-debated phrase *ryousai kenbo*, though it is also often attributed to Mori Arinori and other members of the Japanese government. The *Meiokusha* published a journal titled *Meioku zasshi* (trans. Meiji Six Magazine) in which they claimed that women “would inevitably be central figures to social change,”²⁰ much to the chagrin of the government. Their efforts went largely overlooked especially in the historiography of Japanese feminism, for the *Meiokusha* was comprised overwhelmingly of men.

The efforts of the *Meiokusha* for women’s rights within a transforming Japan did not go unacknowledged within their time. A political opposition movement entitled *Jiyuu minken undou* (literally translated as “Movement for Freedom and Popular Rights”) was taking root within Japanese society. Equitable to the suffragettes and bluestockings of the Western feminist movements, the *minken* (“civil rights”) movement, in connection with the Japanese Liberal Party, held rallies and made speeches “to a range of current issues in their own [female] behalf.” According to Sharon Sievers, “[b]y 1878, after having listened for a decade as Japanese men monopolized the debate over women’s rights and the pace and style of Japan’s modernization, many women were eager to present their own views of the country’s future and their potential roles in it.”²¹ One might argue that it was past time for women to stand up and demand a collective voice in the Japanese government. After all, the Meiji Period was a careful study in hypocrisy. Male taxpayers in Japan had the right to vote; women who served as heads-of-

¹⁹ Sievers, 17.

²⁰ Sievers, 25.

²¹ Sievers, 27.

household, and thus as taxpayers, did not.²² Men were legally allowed to cut their hair short in a Western bob; women, even women with medical issues, were not. The position of women as indicated by the *Onna daigaku* was behind men, in a submissive, supporting role, and even in the beginnings of the Meiji Period, politically, that position did not appear to change much.

The focus of the Japanese state on women seems at first incongruous when compared to the contemporary samurai riots and peasant uprisings of the 1870s. According to Anderson, though, it is predictably timed. After all, she claimed, “[a]s Japan’s leaders confronted a hostile world, they encountered an idea with great currency in the West: that the social position of women reflected a country’s level of civilization.”²³ This notion was radical in Japan, though by this point in the West it had been accepted as a fact of life. The position of Japanese women, which was, at the end of the Tokugawa period, had been effectively behind men. It was now on the move, and nobody was sure how it was going to end.

In the 1880s, the most prominent speakers for the women’s rights movement were associated with the Japanese Liberal Party. Kishida Toshiko, the young, impassioned activist of the 1880s, was offered a lecture platform by the Liberal Party to demand the ending of the “practice of respecting men and despising women.” “We are trying,” she said, “through a cooperative effort, to build a new society. [...] Yet in this country, as in the past, men continue to be respected as masters and husbands while women are held in contempt as maids or serving women.”²⁴ At twenty, Kishida was touring the Japanese islands as the young and fresh-faced representative of the *minken* movement. “Committed to her country and the women in it,” writes Sievers, “Kishida felt that the exclusion of women from the tasks of nationbuilding was irrational,

²² Marnie Anderson, *A Place in Public: Women’s Rights in Meiji Japan* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010). See pg. 28-55 for more information on this topic.

²³ Anderson, 5.

²⁴ Sievers, 38.

and to the extent that such exclusion meant a continuation of ‘respecting men and despising women,’ unethical as well.”²⁵ Her speeches motivated discussion groups and articles; the papers accused her of affairs with married men in an attempt to discredit her, but she simply continued her speech-work. The title of one of her most famous speeches, made in Okayama, was “The Government Lords It Over the People; Men Lord It Over Women.”²⁶ Even in the early days of the feminist movement in Japan, feminist speakers were already correlating the Japanese state with gender, and their own trials with that of the nation. “[Y]ou men of the world,” Kishida said, “you talk of reform, but not of revolution. When it comes to equality, you yearn for the old ways, and follow, unchanged, the customs of the past.”²⁷ As at this point Japan was looking to recreate itself out of the ashes of the old, for women to be forced back into the restrictions of the past was an affront to the patriotic sentiments of many, though elements of the government did not see it that way.

Like many other women associated with the Liberal Party, Kishida’s pulpit was snatched away upon the party’s dissolution. It had been the victim, Sievers claims, of “divided leadership and government oppression.”²⁸ It never recovered. The *minken* movement had to be transformed. The platform which had been developed for women on the national state in Japan was destroyed, and so women turned to new avenues to make their case: as shown most predominantly by Hiratsuka Raichou and Tsuda Umeko, they turned to literature and to education to affect the rapidly changing world around them.

An Authentic Person: The Writing of Hiratsuka Raichou

²⁵ Sievers, 35.

²⁶ Sievers, 37.

²⁷ Sievers, 39.

²⁸ Sievers, 43

“The New Woman,” wrote Hiratsuka Raichou, “rejects ‘yesterday.’ No longer will she tread in submissive silence the path taken by oppressed women of the past. No longer will she be kept in ignorance[.] [...] The New Woman is determined to destroy the old morality and laws established by men for their own convenience.”²⁹ Throughout her life, Hiratsuka Raichou was exceptional. She began her work as a feminist a good ten years before any of her contemporaries.³⁰ Her love life verged on the utterly bizarre, especially for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; after a failed love-suicide attempt immediately after her graduation from college³¹, Hiratsuka lived conjugally with the man she eventually married, Okumura Hiroshi, for almost thirty years out of wedlock, and bore him three children before she finally became his wife. She was also a founding and contributing member of both *Seitou*, the first literary magazine by women, for women in Japanese history; she lobbied for political change on the behalf of the Association of New Women, and made a huge impact on Japanese women’s history as both writer and activist.³² It was in her writing that her perspective—both on feminism *and* nationalism—can be most easily uncovered, and it was through her writing that Hiratsuka found what she eventually decided was her calling: the liberation of Japanese women from the ideals of *good wife, wise mother*.

The development of the Japanese feminist movement is comparable to many European nations, and, indeed, much of Japanese culture and society in the Meiji Period had been drawn from Western sources. According to Karen Offen:

The historical development of feminism in Europe accompanied the growth and democratization of nation-states, the spread of literacy through mass education, and the

²⁹ Hiratsuka, 203.

³⁰ Tomida, 364.

³¹ This was popularly known as the Shiobara Incident, and resulted in Hiratsuka being removed from the list of graduates of her alma mater.

³² Tomida, 364-365.

expansive growth of an urban and ultimately industrialized capitalist market economy. Its roots are, therefore, intertwined with the political, intellectual, and socioeconomic history of early modern Europe[.]³³

Though it may seem counterintuitive to apply European theory to a Japanese context, Japan, especially Japan in the early Meiji Period, was developing and operating within a faux-Western context. In the first place, as previously discussed, Japan during the Meiji Period was undergoing a time of intense, nationwide transformation; the development of feminism in this period correlated almost directly with the expansion of Japanese education laws and the supply and demand of Western academic sources in a Japanese context. Hiratsuka Raichou, like many other Japanese youths in the middling Meiji Period, was in a position to take full advantage of this circumstance. She was born the daughter of a highly-placed government official—her father served as a German translator, and assisted in the development of the Meiji Constitution³⁴—and, as required by new Japanese law, attended elementary school. For her secondary education she went to the Ochanomizu Girls' School in Tokyo, and later to the Japan Women's College, founded by Naruse Jinzou in 1901. There she studied English literature (under the guise of home economics), and upon graduation, returned to her parents' house with no form of employment. It was during this time that she, and a group of her colleagues, founded the literary journal *Seitou*, and it was there that the true affect that nationalism had had upon her interpretation of feminism came to light.

Hiratsuka wrote multiple articles for *Seitou* during its run, but the most significant (and most popular) pieces she published were almost always associated with Japanese women taking back the power that was thought to be owed to them by their existence, and by the state. One, entitled "I Am A New Woman" (a deliberate thumbed-nose to other women within *Seitou* who

³³ Offen, 339-340.

³⁴ Hiratsuka, 2.

were afraid to be identified as the reviled “new woman” stereotype) contained rhetoric worthy of the Meiji Constitution.

The New Woman [Hiratsuka wrote] will not only destroy the old morality and laws built on man’s egotism, but *by virtue of the forever renewing sun*, she will establish within her soul *a new kingdom with a new religion*,³⁵ a new morality, a new set of laws.

Therein lies her inborn mission. But what is this new kingdom whereof I speak? This new religion? The New Woman has yet to know the answers to this.

But in order to know the unknown, she studies, she cultivates the self, strives, and struggles.

For now, she desires only power, the power to persevere so that she may fulfill her ordained mission, so that she may prevail in her studies, self-cultivation, efforts, and struggles to know the unknown.

The New Woman does not seek Beauty. Nor does she seek Goodness. What she cries out for is the power to establish the new and unknown kingdom, the power to fulfill her secret ordained mission.³⁶

The patriotic overtones of “I Am A New Woman” are impossible not to recognize. In this essay, Hiratsuka took a previously awkward and mightily disliked stereotype of “the New Woman”—an over-educated harridan who refused to fulfill her culturally ascribed duties of wife- and motherhood—and turned it into a metaphor for the Japanese state itself. Like Japan, the New Woman was seeking a new nation, and a new religion, in the context of the rising sun; like Japan, the only way this transmogrification could be completed was through the power that the New Woman did not yet have. Hiratsuka’s vision for Japanese women of the Meiji Period and later was, it seemed, intrinsically linked to the idea of *Japanese women embodying the state*. Over and over again, in a multitude of articles, Hiratsuka deliberately identified Japanese women as suns; as an unknown; an educated, self-cultivated, determined being that was forging towards the future, much as the Japanese nation, caught in flux, was pushing towards its own, new

³⁵ Italics my own.

³⁶ Hiratsuka, 203-204.

national identity. “I am a New Woman,” she wrote. “I am the sun. I am myself and myself alone. At least, I hope and strive each day.”³⁷

Hiratsuka chose to look towards the future, and identify with it by calling herself the “New Woman” of Japan. This was in conflict with the experience of the “New Japan” had by many other people of her generation, regardless of sex. The new generation of Japanese in the middle of the Meiji Period were in a unique predicament. They were, in the words of Pyle, “caught in a confrontation of circumstances that intensified the awareness of their heritage and at the same time stigmatized it.”³⁸ The history of the Japanese nation was, alternately, its greatest pride and its greatest shame, for Japan, *through* its history, showed itself to be an out-of-date, out-of-touch society in the eyes of the Western nation. After all, Hiratsuka wrote, “myriad ghosts that haunted the women of the past relentlessly pursue the New Woman. When ‘today’ is idle, ‘yesterday’ rushes in.”³⁹ Like many others in her generation, Hiratsuka had been raised to equate the success of her endeavors with her own patriotism. National consciousness, the sense of many that the definition of “Japanese” had irrevocably changed, was evolving at the same time and along the same lines as Japanese feminism. Likewise, the state had the final word on any say of what being “Japanese” meant, the same way they claimed that the be-all, end-all goal of any Japanese woman’s life was to be the *good wife, wise mother* of the *ryousai kenbo* ideal.

It is impossible to discuss any aspect of feminism and feminine identity, especially within such a setting as Meiji Japan, without involving the question of motherhood. Hiratsuka Raichou had two children, entering them in her own family register, rather than that of her partner,⁴⁰ and

³⁷ Hiratsuka, 203.

³⁸ Kenneth B. Pyle, *The New Generation in Meiji Japan: Problems of Cultural Identity 1885-1895* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), 20.

³⁹ Hiratsuka, 203.

⁴⁰ Tomida, 221.

once she retired from *Seitou* and withdrew from society to devote some time to her family, her perspective on women and motherhood changed completely. At this time, Hiratsuka was serving not only as a technically single mother, but also as a nurse (her partner, Okumura Hiroshi, had tuberculosis) and as a breadwinner (the only working member of the family). Hiratsuka remained completely against denigration of Japanese women outside of the *ryousai kenbo* ideal, but after the birth of her children, she walked a thin line between defending motherhood and rejecting the rhetoric of the Japanese state. She wrote:

If women want to achieve real freedom and independence, then rights for mothers should first be firmly established. I don't really think women's freedom and independence can ever exist in society unless [and until] the rights of mothers are guaranteed.⁴¹

As she had done previously, Hiratsuka drew heavily upon Western sources for her philosophical and political perspectives on motherhood, including Ellen Key's *Love and Marriage*, which had been one of the many texts that *Seitou* had discussed at length. Her newfound focus on the ideals of motherhood, however, led her into conflict with other contemporary feminists, which, historically, has come to be known as the *bosei hogo ronsou* (literally translated, controversy over the protection of motherhood). The controversy amounted to the near-vitriolic discussion of the rights of mothers between four women (Hiratsuka, Yosano Akiko, Yamada Waka, and Yamakawa Kikue⁴²) in a public, published context. The conflict itself centered on feminine identity in regards to motherhood, especially in the context of working women and single mothers.

In the words of Tomida, Hiratsuka “believed that children were not simply possessions of their mothers, who had the closest influence upon them, but also of society and the state. To her,

⁴¹ Tomida, 223.

⁴² Depending on whether one-off responses are included, the number of participants easily doubles.

children were the future destiny of Japan.”⁴³ She pushed for state-based financial support of mothers in Japanese society, and for the protection for the rights of motherhood beyond the *ryousai kenbo* ideal. Instead, in her essays she lobbied for “advocat[ing] family allowances to help protect motherhood” and “disapproved of mother’s work outside of the home during the early stages of child-rearing”—while simultaneously approving independent feminine employment. Nearly the entirety of her argument was framed within the context of the state. She wrote:

Attempting to keep women of marriageable age, who are capable of producing healthy children, unmarried and in the labour market for a long period of time (or for the rest of their lives⁴⁴), would not only be unfortunate for women but also bring a great loss to the state.⁴⁵

In less than a hundred words, Hiratsuka had settled herself firmly on the side of the state, in a way that she rarely ever accomplished in her long career as a feminist and activist. She framed the context of woman- and motherhood within a national perspective, while simultaneously claiming the rights of motherhood *for herself* and for other Japanese women, both for the state and against it. As a single, cohabitating mother, which by the definition of *ryousai kenbo* was anathema to the nation, Hiratsuka was still framing her own opinions within the nationalistic rhetoric of turn-of-the-century Japan.

Controversy and contradiction surrounded Hiratsuka all her life, in her education, her career, and her family life. By her very existence, Hiratsuka Raichou flouted the ideals of Japanese womanhood. She refused to buy into the propagandistic ideology of the Meiji state, but somehow managed to escape the censure of others who attempted the same thing. Even after her

⁴³ Tomida, 234.

⁴⁴ This in response to Yosano Akiko’s assertion that women ought to remain childless and spouseless until they had established themselves as economically independent beings, a remarkable perspective for the day.

⁴⁵ Tomida, 236.

scandalous affair with a married man, which nearly resulted in her own death, Hiratsuka forged on—much like the Japan, and the New Japanese Woman, that she portrayed in print. Patriotism and nationalistic rhetoric was her method of expression, and Hiratsuka was an extraordinarily talented expresser.

American Girl: Tsuda Umeko and the Cult of Domesticity

Kume Kunitake was the recorder of the Iwakura Mission, which from 1871 to 1873 traveled worldwide as a collection of politicians, ambassadors, ministers, and students, to study the world which Japan had cut itself off from for so long. He wrote: “It seems to me that, when traveling in distant lands, everything one sees and hears each day is extraordinary.”⁴⁶ Though he wrote the Iwakura Embassy documents for the purpose of educating and transcribing the events that the Embassy experienced while traveling abroad, this particular quote serves as an emblem particularly towards the young women left behind in the United States—five girls, aged seven to fourteen, who became the first Japanese study abroad students in history. As Japanese girls on a new continent, everything in their new, Western world would have been extraordinary. It proved too extraordinary for two of them, as they returned to Japan before the ten year program was completed. Another finished her ten years and went back to Tokyo. The final two petitioned the Japanese government to remain in the United States for a year longer than their program time, to complete their education and to become the best weapons they could to serve the Japanese state. The youngest, Tsuda Ume, was one of those two.

Today [claimed Ito Hirobumi] it is the earnest wish of both our government and our people, to strive for the highest points of civilization enjoyed by more enlightened

⁴⁶ Kunitake Kume, comp., Martin Collcutt, trans. *The Iwakura Embassy: 1871-73. A True Account of the Ambassador Extraordinary & Plenipotentiary's Journey of Observation Through the United States of America and Europe*, vol. 1, *The United States of America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2002), 9.

countries. Looking to this end, we have adopted their military, naval, scientific and educational institutions, and knowledge has flowed to us freely in the wake of flowing commerce.⁴⁷

It was the task of Tsuda and her remaining compatriots—Yamakawa Sutematsu, eleven, and Nagai Shigeko, seven—to fully embody this proposal of Hirobumi's for the new position of Japanese women in this dawning era of change. According to Barbara Rose:

Kuroda⁴⁸ connected the development of Hokkaido with the development of women. Productive expansion, he argued, requires knowledgeable men, and capable men are raised by educated mothers: schools for girls must therefore be founded. The women needed to run these schools, Kuroda reasoned, could be educated in a country that was also expanding control of its own perceived frontiers, the United States. [...T]hese educated Japanese women would be another national resource. [...It was] the emerging rationale for educating women.⁴⁹

For Rose, at least, the main reasoning behind Tsuda Ume⁵⁰ and the other girls being sent to study in the United States was to them to become the leaders of a woman-dependent education system in a newly education-driven Japan. Considering the attitude towards women's education in the early Meiji Period, this idea was not remarkable, though its singular implementation was. All five of these girls came from what had been the samurai class, which had run the Tokugawa state; all five of those families had been deeply connected to the pre-Meiji regime. By the standards of the day, they were already prime tools for cultural and political transformation.⁵¹ Before Tsuda Ume was more than ten years old, her life had already been irrevocably shaped by the nationalistic impulses of the men in her life, from her father, Tsuda Sen⁵², who put her forward for the program, to the entire Ministry of Education.

⁴⁷ The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, Tokyo, comp. *Meiji Japan through Contemporary Sources*, vol. 2, 1844 ~ 1882 (Tokyo: Tenrijiyosha Printing Co., Ltd. 1970), 97.

⁴⁸ Kuroda Kiyotaka was both the deputy head of the Hokkaido Colonization Board and a cultural ambassador to the United States in the 1870s.

⁴⁹ Barbara Rose, *Tsuda Umeko and Women's Education in Japan* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1991), 11.

⁵⁰ She later changed her name to "Umeko" after returning to Japan.

⁵¹ Rose, 11.

⁵² Coincidentally, Sen was a member of the *Meiropusha*.

Tsuda was housed from the ages of seven to eighteen⁵³ with Charles and Adeline Lanman. Charles Lanman was a secretary at the Japanese legation in Washington, D.C., and his wife was a charity worker; both were devout Episcopalians. Tsuda converted to Christianity in deference to their intense religious faith in 1873, two years after Tsuda had arrived in the United States; she remained a devout Christian all her life. She and Adeline Lanman were particularly close, and upon Tsuda's return to Japan in 1882, they kept up a regular cross-continental epistolary correspondence.

Her return to Japan in 1882, after completing her secondary education, was not as triumphant as she expected. Both Tsuda and her companion, Yamakawa Sutematsu, had perfectly legitimate reasoning to expect a rousing welcome from the Ministry of Education; they had sacrificed their language, their families, and ten years of their lives to live in a foreign country with the express intention of teaching Japanese women according to Western ideals. Upon their return, though, they were completely ignored. "A few years ago," she wrote to Mrs. Laman, "everything foreign was liked, and the cry was progress. Now, Japanese things are being put ahead, and everything foreign is not approved of, simply because it is foreign. ...If we wish the government to endow for us an English school for girls, we have come home at a bad time."⁵⁴

Tsuda was in a delicate position. As an ethnically Japanese woman, she had spent over ten years in the United States, and could no longer speak her native language; her home nation was entirely foreign to her.⁵⁵ She struggled with Japanese for years after her return to the archipelago. While her two closest companions married and had children, Tsuda remained stubbornly single. She wrote to her foster mother that "in all probability. I shall never marry and

⁵³ This is in the Japanese way of counting, which, like in China, counts a full year higher than one's actual age, in deference to the amount of time spent in the womb.

⁵⁴ Furuki, 51.

⁵⁵ Rose, 41-49.

I am more and more thankful that Father [Tsuda Sen] will let me be an old maid. And I am sure he will let me have free choice.”⁵⁶ Tsuda never actually married. Instead, she taught for a while at a school for rich, upper-class young women. In 1889 she went on a paid leave-of-absence and returned to the United States to continue her education at Bryn Mawr University. She achieved a degree in biology after three years⁵⁷ and returned to Japan in 1892 after founding the American Women’s Scholarship for Japanese Women. She also submitted articles to *The Chicago Record* on the topic of Japanese women and their future, which were published in January 1897.⁵⁸ Eventually, after working at the Women’s Higher Normal School in addition to the Peeresses’ School, she founded an academy for English in Tokyo in 1900: the *Joshi eigaku juku*. The college was named *Tsuda juku* after its founder’s death in 1929; she was sixty-four years old.

In Japanese terms, Tsuda Umeko did not identify as and cannot be called a feminist, even considering the individualistic definitions of *feminism* that appear in Meiji literature. Her work in women’s education was constantly and consistently within the boundaries laid out for her by the state. Though she may have pushed for women to educate themselves for *their own sake*, rather than simply to become pretty, witty baubles to hang on the arms of great men⁵⁹, she never attempted to use her status as an educator, speaker, or writer to change the status quo. Instead, she worked within the limits of the system. Even though her extensive charity work and her pet projects (her anti-geisha society, for example) correlated in both thought and deed with the actions of many on-the-ground feminists, she never associated with the moniker of the New Woman. It is likely that she knew how much of a negative affect that appellation would have had upon her reputation as an educator of Japan’s elite.

⁵⁶ Furuki, 57.

⁵⁷ Rose, 94.

⁵⁸ Furuki, 324.

⁵⁹ Tsuda Ume changed her name permanently to Umeko in 1902.

At the same time, however, Tsuda had grown up in a distinctly Western context, with a distinctly Western set of values. Her foster mother, Alice Lanman, valued the American ideal of a “woman who did her own work”: that is, the image of domesticity as portrayed by Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1864. “[T]he existence of such a class is a fact peculiar to American society,” wrote Stowe, “a clear, plain result of the new principles involved in the doctrine of universal equality.”⁶⁰ Tsuda was linked irrevocably to this idyllic image of domesticity, which she then translated into Japanese terms. “Home life and the education that produced true ladies—‘intellectual and physical, religious, moral, and polite’—were the cornerstones of the American cult of domesticity,” writes Rose,⁶¹ and in *Joshi eigaku juku*, these qualities were critical. This perspective on domesticity fits fairly evenly within the ideals of *ryousai kenbo*, which further enabled Tsuda to work within the confines of the patriotism of the Meiji State. However, there were distinctive elements of American domesticity which didn’t fit into Japanese culture, and it was these that caused Tsuda such distraction. Even in her early years in Japan, Tsuda was horrified at the lack of ‘charitable feeling’ expressed by Japanese ladies, and worked to start several organizations in order to better assist the poor and cleans the moral palate of Japanese society.⁶² “These Japanese ladies,” she wrote, “many of them, especially the high ones, never heard of charity, never worked to help, probably never gave a thought to it, and to work something with their own hands and give it and *sell* it! is something unheard of.”⁶³ But it was in her publication *Japanese Girls and Women*, a monograph on Japanese society, that the effect of American domesticity on Tsuda Umeko is truly revealed. *Japanese Girls and Women* catalogued the sufferings of Japanese women within the Meiji state, discussing the injustices and unfair

⁶⁰ Harriet Beecher Stowe, “The Lady Who Does Her Own Work,” in *The Oven Birds: American Women on Womanhood*, Gail Parker, ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1972), 184.

⁶¹ Rose, 29.

⁶² Furuki, 149.

⁶³ Furuki, 149.

values of society in the late nineteenth century. She, like Hiratsuka, described Japanese women in terms of the Japanese state itself: “Just as Japan’s progress [was] stunted, so, too, [were] its females: beautiful but pinched, nipped, and strangulated, rather like bonsai.”⁶⁴ Tsuda did very little to offer solutions to these dilemmas other than in vague suggestions of improvement, but the core of her argument is the claim that only opportunity through education, and through legislative reform, could Japanese women take their true place—which, coincidentally, corresponded with both *ryousai kenbo* and American domestic theory. She wrote:

Legislation once effected, all the rest will come, and the wife, secure in her home and her children, will be at the point where her new education can be of use to her in the administration of her domestic affairs and the training of her children: and where she will finally become the friend and companion of the husband, instead of his mere waitress, seamstress, and housekeeper,—the plaything of his leisure moments, too often the victim of his caprices.⁶⁵

It was this theory that would later become the core of the *Joshi eigaku juku*. Women in the new Japan, in Tsuda’s eyes, ought to be the perfect blend of Japanese patriot and the heiress of a Western ideal of domesticity: they were the embodiment of *ryousai kenbo*. In other words, the American domestic education offered to Japanese women by Tsuda Umeko was irrevocably joined with Japanese nationalism.

Becoming Chrysanthemums: Imperialism, Feminism, and Educational Nationalism

Education in Japan transformed after the Imperial Rescript of 1890. What was seen as progressive, by Western nations, became enmeshed with the Shinto police state of the Meiji Period. Imperialism, feminism, education—all of it was linked intrinsically with the socio-religious political movement of *kokugaku*, a group of highly educated Japanese scholars (comparable in some ways to the *Meirokeisha*) who saw the formation of Japan’s Meiji State as a

⁶⁴ Rose, 85.

⁶⁵ Rose, 86.

reflection of the West to be an affront to the nation. To claim this is a vast oversimplification, but it is nevertheless true that, like many imperialist elements in the Tokugawa Period, the *kokugaku* scholars protested the Buddhist/Confucianist *bakufu* state and pushed for a return for what they saw as “traditional” Japanese values: the belief that the Emperor and his line were descended from the goddess of the sun, Amaterasu-no-Omikami, and that Japan itself was the land of the gods. This concept was written in the very first article of the Meiji Constitution, scripted in February 1889: “The Empire of Japan shall be reigned over and governed by a line of Emperors unbroken for ages eternal.”⁶⁶ According to Ito Hirobumi, the Emperor was “heaven-descended, divine and sacred; he is pre-eminent above all his subjects. He must be revered and is inviolable...the law has no power to hold him accountable to it.”⁶⁷

As the 1880s drew to a close and the Japanese state became less and less enamored with the Western powers, the proposals of *kokugaku* allies became more palatable to the Meiji government. In 1890, the themes of the *kokugaku* movement were heavily entrenched within Japanese politics and education, culminating with the scripting of the Imperial Rescript. This document, which considering the weight it held within Japanese society seems almost amusingly short, proposed a reverence of the Emperor which was educationally sanctioned. All Japanese schools now had a portrait of the Meiji Emperor in their classrooms; all classes had to recite the Rescript upon coming together in the morning. It read:

[...] Our Imperial Ancestors have founded Our Empire on a basis broad and everlasting and have deeply and firmly implanted virtue; Our subjects ever united in loyalty and filial piety have from generation to generation illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Empire, and herein also lies the source of Our education.

Ye, Our subjects, be filial to your parents, affectionate to your brothers and

⁶⁶ The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, Tokyo, comp. *Meiji Japan through Contemporary Sources*, vol. 1, *Basic Documents, 1854 ~ 1889* (Tokyo: Press Co., Ltd., 1969), 95.

⁶⁷ *Contemporary Sources*, vol. 1, 182.

sisters; as husbands and wives be harmonious, as friends true; bear yourselves in modesty and moderation; extend your benevolence to all; pursue learning and cultivate arts and thereby develop intellectual faculties and perfect moral powers; furthermore advance public good and promote common interests; always respect the Constitution and observe the laws; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth. [...]⁶⁸

While the Imperial Rescript has been brought forward in multitudes of historiographical discussions on the topic of Japanese imperialism (the line which requests all Japanese citizens “offer themselves courageously to the state” is of particular significance in this respect) the fact remains that this document, which asserted the virtuous and so-called “everlasting” trait of the Japanese state, was being read aloud in schools all across the nation. Tsuda Umeko’s *Joshi eigaku juku* was no different from the rest in this regard. “[Tsuda’s] advantage lay in her ability to expand women’s opportunities without challenging the status quo, a success achieved by rooting her program in the compelling American ideology of domesticity and the equally powerful Japanese ideology of *ryousai kenbo*.”⁶⁹ Tsuda, like many other educators in Japan at the time (regardless of sex) was participating in the social cult of imperialism which Japanese nationalism became: a combination of socio-cultural elements which were simultaneously very new (as shown by the adaption of Western culture into Japanese) and thought to be very, very old (the vast majority of ceremonies and religious rituals which defined life from the Meiji Period onwards in Japan were created out of whole cloth in the early years of the era⁷⁰). This created a cultural atmosphere of whiplash-inducing confusion which both Tsuda and Hiratsuka were forced to operate within.

⁶⁸ The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, Tokyo, comp. *Meiji Japan through Contemporary Sources*, vol. 3, 1869 ~ 1894 (Tokyo: Hinode Co., Ltd., 1972), 128

⁶⁹ Rose, xi.

⁷⁰ Takashi Fujitani, “Introduction: Inventing, Forgetting, Remembering,” from *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 4-18.

The youth of Meiji Japan were caught between the metaphorical rock and hard place in regards to their own identities. After all, when the past was being reviled as “backwards” and “outdated,” and the future in a constant state of flux, all that could be depended on was the present, and the moral, religious, educational, and political values of the times were being constantly amended according to public and political approval. According to Pyle, “The sensitivity of youth to the cleavage between Japanese and Western was heightened by the rapid growth of national consciousness. They grew up at a time when the new government was seeking to strengthen itself by deliberately fostering a sense of belonging to the nation [...] But though national consciousness thus permeated the thinking of the new generation, national pride did not.”⁷¹ The whole of Japanese culture was being couched in its relevance to a constantly changing definition of what it meant to be “Japanese”, and not only education, but all branches of Japanese society were affected by it, including Tsuda and Hiratsuka.

Too Much Learning: The Effect of Nationalism on Hiratsuka and Tsuda

In many ways, Hiratsuka Raichou and Tsuda Umeko were united within their respective contexts. After all, as two educated women with a distinctly upper-middle-class perspective, they were for the most part coming from the same cultural standpoint—at least, at first glance. Their differences made them stand out as much as two prominent women in Japanese society *could* stand out—one as an educator and, in the eyes of Japanese society, a pseudo-American, the other as an activist, single mother, and overall bad influence. At the same time, due to their similarities in opinion, in certain respects, Hiratsuka and Tsuda were famous examples of women in their time; regardless of the fact that they could not and did not represent Japanese women *as a whole*, they functioned as alternate sides of the same, nationalistic coin.

⁷¹ Pyle, 19.

“The goal of the Meiji [educational] system was first and foremost universal elementary education aimed at producing law-abiding, productive, moral, and patriotic citizens,”⁷² writes Martha Tocco, and in regards to both Hiratsuka and Tsuda, she was very much correct. Education in the Meiji Period was not only for personal betterment and enjoyment, but also for the purpose of creating educated citizens who could better serve the Japanese state—an ideal embodied in the Imperial Rescript on Education released by the Meiji Emperor in 1890. Becoming educated was to better the state, and through that bring greater joy and opportunity to the Emperor, whose presence by his very nature cemented Japan’s place in the world as a sacred nation.

The identification of education with the imperial agenda had a strong impression upon Tsuda especially, for on a number of occasions it became a very personal experience. On a number of occasions, members of the imperial family would visit high-class educational institutions to oversee the betterment of Japanese citizens. In 1885, Tsuda Umeko was appointed as a teacher at the *Touyou jojuku*, or the Peeresses’ Academy in Tokyo; there, the Meiji Empress was known to attend both opening and closing ceremonies. These events were described extensively in Tsuda’s letters to her foster mother: how the entire school would troop out to greet the Empress and her ladies; how each teacher would lead their classes back inside and attend to the day; how the royal party would enter each classroom and observe. “The minute the door was opened by the Principal,” she wrote, “I made the girls stand and we waited until the Empress came in. When she was seated, we all bowed, and I made one of the girls read and then asked some little questions. As English was uninteresting to the Empress, she soon took her leave, and

⁷² Martha Tocco, “Made In Japan: Meiji Women’s Education” in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, ed. Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), 51.

we had to go through our salute again...”⁷³ At a school full of the daughters of high-class families, especially in the pre-Rescript period, Tsuda was enmeshed in a society struggling to transform itself into one on the same industrial, intellectual, philosophical, and economic level as Europe, *without* becoming a mockery of the west—one in which the wife of a God would visit a girl’s day school in Tokyo, just to see the young women of the nation at work. Education was being crafted in terms of patriotism and imperialistic nationalism, and its educators were unable to escape it.

By the end of the 1880s, the honeymoon period that Japan had had with Western ideas and nations had soured. Japan, according to Rose, was “beginning to react against perceived Western excesses, and anti-foreign sentiment and attacks on the corrupting influence of Western thought were already apparent in the field of education.”⁷⁴ Not only that, but women’s education—which had begun, as shown in the trope of the Meiji schoolgirl, on a fairly positive note—was regressing to a state of complete ineptitude. Women were becoming educated, but only after their marriages. “These women were educated merely because of their husband’s high positions. They were fitted, in other words, to appear at official functions as wives of great men,”⁷⁵ writes Rose. This was anathema to Tsuda, who had petitioned the Meiji government to remain in America one year longer than her originally prescribed program simply to finish her degree at a girl’s academy in Washington, DC. Tsuda eventually left the Peeresses’ Academy—she was dissatisfied with her role there, especially considering how the Ministry of Education had ignored her in the years immediately after her return from the United States⁷⁶—but it did not change her attitude on education. Rather, it almost seemed to strengthen it. Even in her first few

⁷³ Furuki, 231.

⁷⁴ Rose, 50.

⁷⁵ Rose, 49.

⁷⁶ Rose, 49.

months in Japan, she was already determined to craft an education system for women which would be more than just “fit[ting them] to be wives of the great men. Our aim would be to reach the higher classes, of course. Now we have many obstacles; among them, prejudice against women’s education, and then teaching is so cheap in Japan, and they refuse to pay more than a mere pittance [...]he school must be small at first, but we hope that we may see a fine school.”⁷⁷

Despite her efforts, Tsuda’s dream for women’s education was not going to come true within her lifetime, not outside of the *Joshi eigaku juku*. Even in the midst of Tsuda’s work, education for women in Japan was, at its best, developmentally stunted. Women, by popular opinion of the time, had no reason to continue their education beyond a high school diploma. Hiratsuka Raichou’s father, who had for all her childhood been extraordinarily liberal and accepting, outright refused to allow her to go to college, claiming that “[t]oo much learning is bound to make a woman unhappy.”⁷⁸ According to Hiratsuka:

My father, sad to say, was no more enlightened than other members of society who opposed women’s higher education. I shall never forget his concluding remark: “A parent’s duty to a daughter ends with high school.” My sister, who had finished school the previous year, was content to busy herself with lessons in the koto, violin, and German; poetry composition; and studying *The Tale of Genji*. My father saw no reason why I should not do the same; women were supposed to do what they had always done—stay at home and manage the household. Given his categorical refusal, there was little I could say.⁷⁹

Hiratsuka Raichou, unlike other women in similar situations, did ignore her father, and attended college anyway. She was desperate to learn, and to continue what she referred to as “[her] awakening interest in religion, ethics, and philosophy”⁸⁰; her father’s opinion was not going to get in the way of that. With the assistance of her mother, Hiratsuka convinced her father

⁷⁷ Furuki, 24.

⁷⁸ Hiratsuka, 65.

⁷⁹ Hiratsuka, 65.

⁸⁰ Hiratsuka, 64.

to allow her to study at Japan Women's College—supposedly focusing in home economics—and began attending in 1901. She remained there for several years, secretly taking classes in English literature rather than the topic she had promised her father she would pursue.⁸¹

Her assistance in founding the *Seitou* society was also wrapped up in her own personal obsession with education. Eventually, *Seitou* and its society became one of Hiratsuka's prime methods in countering the rhetoric of the state, though when it first began, she did not and could not envision it in such a way. In the immediate aftermath of the Shiobara Incident, Hiratsuka retreated to Nagano Prefecture, and “used this [1908] interlude to recover from stress, and to develop her literary skills.”⁸² Originally, Hiratsuka had no intention of making a life for herself as a writer. “I had neither the temperament nor the talent, and even if I did, I doubted that writing a good novel would bring me the kind of emotional and intellectual satisfaction I sought,” she wrote.⁸³ However, faced with the fact that at twenty-six years old, she was still living with her parents, and without any sort of income, Hiratsuka capitulated. *Seitou* was the brainchild of one Ikuta Choukou, a mentor of Hiratsuka's, who brought forward the idea that there could be a literary magazine for women which would be compiled, written, and organized entirely by women, rather than the more common alternative.⁸⁴ Though Hiratsuka was at first reluctant, she soon became entranced. The statement of purpose—for both the journal and the organization which crafted it—reads as follows (all unconventional italics are the author's own):

This is no longer the time for women to indulge in somnolent indolence. We must rouse ourselves without delay and develop to the full *the talents that Heaven has given us*. We hereby launch *Seitou*, an organization made up exclusively of women and dedicated to the furtherance of women's thought, art, and *moral cultivation*. We also inaugurate our journal *Seitou* and open it to all nameless women who share our ideas. We hope and

⁸¹ Tomida, 94.

⁸² Tomida, 139.

⁸³ Hiratsuka, 143.

⁸⁴ Tomida, 141.

moreover, believe, that the journal will give birth to outstanding women writers of genius.⁸⁵

Seitou ran a multitude of articles on the new status of women and womanhood in fiction from around the world, and for this they received the journalistic title “New Women.” The society discussed everything from women characters in European plays to the consumption of alcohol; they published stories and articles on extramarital affairs, miscarriages, motherhood, singledom, and, significantly, education. One of the most primary examples of this was Hiratsuka’s review of *A Doll’s House*, a play about a woman called Nora who leaves her family for the sake of her own self-actualization and betterment. “[N]ow that you’re one step out the door, I worry about you. It’s pitch dark, you can’t tell east from west, and your steps are unsteady. I feel that I should follow you and make sure you’re all right,”⁸⁶ wrote Hiratsuka. Though this review seems to buy into the *ryousai kenbo* ideal of women in the home, it was not the woman *leaving* that Hiratsuka objected to, but rather her future, for “[Nora’s] action did not spring from a genuine discovery of the self [...] her self-awakening was too facile and shallow,”⁸⁷ Hiratsuka wrote later. Her review of *A Doll’s House* was followed by many other opinion articles, which was the vehicle of *Seitou* in the first place. It was most significantly a collection of opinion pieces, which varied depending on the writer; Hiratsuka contributed significantly. The entire point of *Seitou* was to promote the “literary genius” of Japanese women, just as Tsuda Umeko’s school, the *Joshi eigaku juku*, was built around the idea that “[Women] need those higher qualities which fit in with modern civilization and modern life. [...] we need the best education in these critical times for our women.”⁸⁸ Not only that, the rhetoric in which both *Seitou* the organization and *Seitou* the magazine were constructed was cached in

⁸⁵ Hiratsuka, 143.

⁸⁶ Hiratsuka, 168.

⁸⁷ Hiratsuka, 168.

⁸⁸ Rose, 131-132.

imperialistic, nationalistic dialogue which can be matched to not only the Imperial Rescript on Education, but also to the Constitution's description of the Emperor and the Japanese nation.

Seitou goes a long way to reveal many of Hiratsuka's opinions and ideas, which she herself distilled down into powerful arguments. There is no comparable source for Tsuda outside of her letters to her foster-mother, and those are on occasion fragmented and confusing. They do show that Tsuda Umeko and Hiratsuka Raichou were separated not only by age and upbringing, but also in political opinion. Tsuda Umeko never truly meshed with the ideals of the "New Woman" and the feminist movement—like many of her generation and her upbringing, she was completely against the idea of women gaining the vote, which was one of the primary objectives of Hiratsuka's cohorts—but her ideals for Japanese women's education, underdeveloped though they were in some respects, were along the same lines as those of Hiratsuka Raichou. Their focus was on education as an instrument to better Japanese women, and in the Meiji Period, this was exceptionally rare. Not only that, but the methods they used to propose and enforce this idea of self-betterment for women were couched in the terms of many different political, social, and cultural movements within the same period: the language of patriotism.

Conclusions: The Imperial Chrysanthemums

Even in the eyes of historians, the Meiji Era is nearly impossible to quantify. Despite the major body of work done on the topic, from nearly every sort of perspective, the sheer transformative nature of the era makes it self-contradictory, a society in which what was legal, acceptable, and encouraged one day became reviled, despised, and illegal the next. The multitudes of popular movements in Japanese society at this time (on everything from worker's rights to the motherhood debate to philosophical discussions on the implications of statehood) were just as widespread and multivarious. But even considering the one-step-forward, three-

steps-back attitude of Meiji Japan in regards to women's rights, the period of 1868 to 1912 CE became one of the most important eras in Japanese history in regards to the feminist movement. Women from all walks of life came forward to discuss what it meant to be female, the rights of women in society, and the role that women would play in the construction of this revolutionary society. Many of these speakers were trapped within an upper-middle-class context (after all, feminism developed alongside women's education, and many Japanese women in lower economic brackets could not go to school, despite legal requirements). The arguments they put forward were definitely limited by the society in which they lived; Tsuda Umeko personally met the imperial family on multiple occasions, and Hiratsuka Raichou supported her family through literary means rather than working in a factory. Despite this, these two women especially were emblematic of the trend within women's culture during the Meiji Period of enveloping their opinions, on a multitude of topics, within the rhetoric of the state. Despite all of the posturing, the complications, and the contradictions, Hiratsuka Raichou and Tsuda Umeko worked within the same context, pushed towards the same goal: to allow women the educational and political power to affect and decide for themselves the direction in which their nation would travel in the new century. And it was through the rhetoric and metaphor of *kokugaku* nationalism that they achieved this goal. After all, in the words of Hiratsuka Raichou:

I am a New Woman.
 At least, I hope and strive each day to be truly a new Woman.
 The sun alone is truly and forever new.
I am the sun.
 At last, I hope and strive each day to be the sun.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Hiratsuka, 203.

Appendix

Bakufu. 幕府. The Confucianist military-state of Japan, which lasted in different forms from 1192 to 1867 CE.

Bosei hogo ronsou. 母性保護論争. Controversy Over the Protection of Motherhood.

Hiratsuka Raichou. 平塚ライチョウ.

Jiyuu minken undou. 自由民権運動. Movement for Freedom and Popular Rights. Alternatively known as *minken* (民権), or Civil Rights.

Joshi eigaku juku. 女子英学塾. Women's English Academy.

Kokugaku. 国学. Country-learning, or a National Revival movement in Japanese philosophical, political, and religious culture.

Meirokeisha. 明六社. The Meiji Six Society.

Onna daigaku. 女大学. Greater Learning for Women.

Ryousai kenbo. 良妻賢母. Good wife, wise mother.

Seitou. 政党. Bluestocking.

Touyou jojuku. 東洋女塾. The Peeresses' Academy.

Tsuda Umeko. 津田梅子.

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